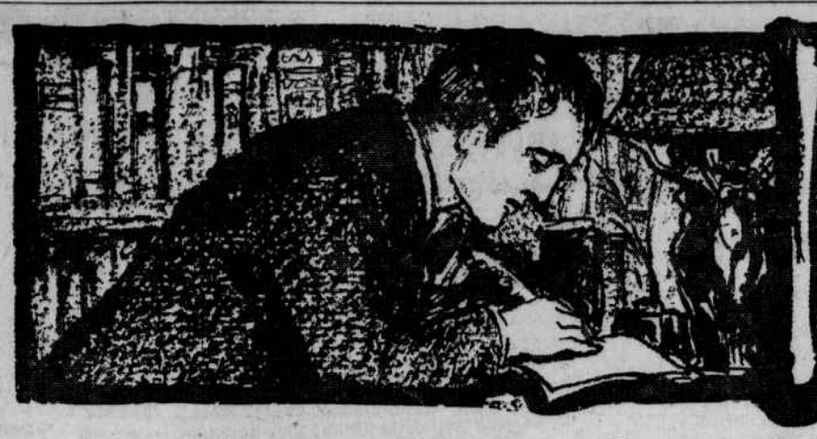

BOOKS

REVIEWS OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS WITH NEWS AND VIEWS OF AUTHORS

Soundings in the Sea of Ink

Fighting Takes Up Too Much Room Mr. George's Complex. Yankee Talk

Rewriting History.

LIKE a vain and noisy actor, War has crowded the chronicles of the past, cutting the character and comedy parts with a stupid sword that marred all values. There might have been excuse for the generations that actually engaged in these bloody episodes. But for the scholars of a peaceful era to go on perpetuating the distortions of rage, parroting over the soldier's brag and leaving the great story of the nation's growth untold—well, all that can be said is that human nature is that way.

Happily the case is not hopeless. The scientists, the students of social progress, even the popular writers who have played up the romance of business are doing their part to correct the proportions. The spectacular success of Wells's "Outline of History" proves that the reading public welcomes a fresher, truer view. Wells himself admits the imperfection of detail in his first attempt. He has done what he could to remedy faults in a new edition, now issued in a single volume.

But the last stronghold of tradition is the school. The child's first impressions, never wholly removed in later life, are usually made by writers of no authority, who follow the easiest way by retelling the old stories.

The future development of published history will probably be along two lines: the complete world view of the general stream of life; and the intimate revelation of a wide range of interest.

The fixed and formal definition of history as a moving picture spectacle of battle scenes with the actual life of the peoples a mere hyphen to connect wars no longer holds. A good example of the newer treatment is Frederic L. Paxson's "Recent History of the United States" (Houghton Mifflin Company). This begins at the close of the civil war and comes down to the present.

The triumph of this book is the evenness with which the pattern is woven. The beginnings of each change in the national life are traced. Parties and personalities emerge and fade into the growing fabric of events. The arts, education, religious currents have their place with business expansion.

A portrait of Mark Twain in his Oxford gown is one of the leading illustrations. And the fact suggested is closer to the heart of history than many a famous triumph of arms. And such a paragraph as this is history also:

"The rise of sport in America between the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 and the World's Fair at Chicago in 1893 is due in part to a readjustment of American life from rural to urban conditions, and provides the outlets that replaced the frontier as it was closed. Before the civil war there was little sport in America. The Turnverein members had imported group gymnastics from Germany. There was some racing of both horses and boats, and there was much hunting on a small scale, but sport was generally only an afterthought and a by-product . . . Robert Bonner, who owned Maud S when her records beat the world, found the burden of proof still against him, as the public asked why a man of known respectability should devote so much of his attention to sport."

Only a fifth of the volume is devoted to the recent war. And here also the general activities of the world behind the fighting lines are duly emphasized.

This is a good book. The author is more judicial than Wells. At times the reader wishes there were a little more enthusiasm in the narrative. But the union of fire and fairness in the same writer is uncommon. Maybe it will be less rare in the day of our hope.

* * *

"I Hate Poetry."

ONE of the curiosities of current literature is the W. L. George poetry complex. Probably nobody but a psychoanalyst could get at the reason for it. But it is obviously something deeper than a mere effort to be original. And it isn't safe to jump to conclusions in a matter like that. But certainly the impression left on the reader is that Mr. George is half conscious—or perhaps it is together subconscious—of a lack in his own equipment which makes him angry. So he tries to shout down the poets.

I noticed a passage of this kind in his lively and tolerant book of American impressions, "Hail Columbia." But the book was so good of its kind that it seemed better to let the absurd paragraph go without comment. Now he does it again in his novel "Ursula Trent" (Harper's), a book notable for keen observation and freedom from traditional prejudice. But though a fiction writer need not express his own view in the talk of his people, Mr. George has plainly done so, particularly if the passage in "Hail Columbia" be recalled. Ursula begins like this:

"Now I hate poetry. I suppose it's crude of me, but I feel that to write poetry is just a way of getting one's self misunderstood in a complicated manner." And the young doctor with whom she is talking, a quite different type in other respects, makes the adverse vote unanimous:

"Poetry is only a superstition. A sort of degraded music. . . . Everything that is said in poetry can be said in prose more easily and completely. The fact remains that if you want a rhyme to 'cat' it must be something like mat or pat or rat. Now rat happens to fit, and all is well in that case. But imagine the wretched situation of a poet with his cat hero in a barn where there are no rats, but only mice. He would have to torture, to mangle his line so as to end: 'A mouse, not a rat.' In other words he would have to drag in the wretched rat.

"If you want melody buy a penny whistle. And, anyhow, if all you want is melody, why bother about the sense at all? Why not juxtapose words that sound well, such as purple, primula, Endymion? There's quite a nice line for you: Endymion's purple primula. Doesn't mean anything, but sounds well. That's why it's poetry. Miss Trent, let me give you that opinion of poetry as a keepsake, since you're leaving the world—I mean returning to your family. Don't be taken in. Neither by political traditions, nor by class habits, nor by the worship of Latin or Greek or poetry or the musical glasses."

Now Charles Darwin was as frank as Mr. George in confessing his inability to enjoy poetry. But he was too great, too wise a man to blame that upon the poetry. He quietly expressed a deep regret that he had not tried to develop such powers as he had in that direction. He realized that he had missed something precious, a treasure of human heritage. He knew a good deal more about the relation of cat and rat than does Mr. George. But he said nothing about the difficulties of rhyme in case the rat turned into a mouse. He left all that humbly to Robert Browning (who was capable of rhyming "promise" with "from mice" without a qualm!). He was scientist enough to recognize his own disabilities.

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American Speech.

GALSWORTH.'S latest collection, "Six Short Plays" (Scribner's) contains that curious piece "The Little Man." I couldn't help wondering if he wrote that before coming over here. The American in the play furnishes the most curious example of imaginary dialect that has been printed for a long time.

It is not easy to be sure just how the playwright picked up his odd assortment of what he takes for our turns of phrase. Some of them probably come from Bret Harte.

In Drinkwater's introduction to the text of his "Abraham Lincoln" he says frankly that he doesn't know the differences in usage between England and America and therefore does not attempt to indicate any difference. A comparison of his play and Galsworthy's ought to convince anybody of the wisdom of his forbearance. He would have done better if he had let even his negro talk like everybody else.

American writers have sinned in the representation of English characters. But it has been rather in the exaggeration of some marked type, who is labelled as a type. The European has too readily imputed certain personal characteristics and notable habits of speech to Americans of every order. This is John Galsworthy's idea of American talk—or was at one time; he may have learned better since:

"You seem kind of skeery about that. You've had experience, maybe. I'm an optimist—I think we're bound to make the devil hum in the near future. I opine we shall occasion a good deal of trouble to that old party. There's about to be a holocaust of selfish interests. The colonel there with old man Nletch—he won't know himself. There's going to be a very sacred opportunity."

A little knowledge—of another nation's language—is a dangerous thing.

SHE would always remember the red sunset catching up the orchard and making all the apples shine like fairy gold, and Owen leaning over a gate beside her and telling her about his school days. It shot through her mind, while she listened eagerly, that Nick long ago in the Doone Valley had told her of his school days, too, only it had been different then. She had not known how to listen to his confidences, and they had hurt her a little, because he was so hard in his young sense of right. He had none of Owen's delicate, tolerant humor. . . . The light on the apples becomes fierier still under the low, red sky—they were so vivid that they looked enchanted—and Owen, leaning beside her, laughing down into her eyes, looked enchanted, too. There was something dazzling about him, as if he were more than just her friend and Julia's husband. He was beautiful and strange.

"This kind of thing makes a man feel religious," Owen said at last.

"Yes," said Joy, very softly; "it's as quiet as prayer."

Owen looked at her curiously.

"You believe in all that sort of thing, I suppose," he asked, "religion, churches, law and gospels?"

Joy hesitated.

"I believe," she said, "in one thing; at least I don't know even if I believe it, because I suppose believing is being what you think, isn't it, even when you find it hard? I haven't found it hard, but I do believe in love, Owen."

"Love?" asked Owen—his eyes rested on hers with a kindness that seemed to beseech and claim an answering kindness from her. "But that's what I believe in, too, Joy. That oughtn't to pan out very hard."

"Everybody's," she went on, "and for everything; I think it is what we can live on."

Owen laughed softly.

"You interest me less," he said, "when you make it so tall an order. . . ."

—From "The Crystal Heart," by Phyllis Bottome. (Century.)

"Till Ireland Has Her Own"

IRELAND UNFREED. Poems of 1921. By Sir William Watson. John Lane Company.

IN view of the present critical Irish situation particular interest attaches to this poetical appeal by one of the best known living English poets. Evidently Sir William Watson is a firm believer in the justice of Ireland's cause and in her right to freedom; he refers to that country as "the Land of Hope Deferred," and it is his contention that there is in Ireland a spiritual force that must triumph, though for a while physical might prevail, and though England mistakenly follows a course in which "palsying fears" "freeze up noble purpose." Only in liberty for Ireland, as the poet conceives it, can there be rest:

To all who heed, to all the freed,
To all the unfreed, 'tis known
There'll be no rest for Ireland's breast
Till Ireland has her own.
Age after age will nurse the rage
That breeds not rage alone,
Bringing no rest to Ireland's breast
Till Ireland has her own!

Most of the poems in this thin collection have less of a lyrical quality than the above; most of them have a stately and sonorous beat that follows in the Miltonic tradition, and that brings reminders of the majesty of Mr. Watson's splendid "Ode to Autumn." Because written on a theme whose interest must certainly wane in time, they are not likely to be long remembered; but in many, as the following lines will illustrate, there is the quality of real poetry:

Thou whom not joys but perils and pangs allure;
The white foam's sister, as the white foam pure;
The dark storm's daughter, guarding long and late
That far descended heirloom, ancient hate;
I cannot say—"In all things that concerned
Thee and thy hopes I never swerved or turned,
Or held with stumbling mind a wavering creed."
But this at least I can declare, indeed:
Through days with tempest packed, with thunder piled,
My dream was of an Ireland reconciled
By utter undoing of wrongs all earth saw done,
And by full freedom to fair friendship won.

One of the most interesting poems in the collection is that in which the author appeals to America:

Friend with frank tongue, who o'er the unflattering sea
Dost likewise flatter not; who view'st the maze
And tangle of things through no vague shimmering haze;
Pledge thou thy word that if, long urged by thee,
We loose her bonds and set the Thralled One free,
That morn fair deed, crowned with man's golden praise,
Shall not for us, in thy consenting gaze,
Prove the bright mother of dark calamity!
Then shall we know that some who else might mar
The dayspring, and drag midnight from its grave—
Some whose imperial dreams are loth to die—
Will listen first beside the Western wave;
Will hear thy thundered interdict afar,
And flee in terror lest they hear it nigh.

STANTON A. COBLENTZ.

It is not generally known that L. M. Montgomery, novelist, is in private life a minister's wife and writes her books amid the duties of a Canadian parsonage. Her husband is the Rev. Ewan Macdonald of Leaskdale, Ontario. "Rilla of Ingleside" (Stokes) is her latest book.

A Wife's Portrait of a Novelist

Charmian London Tells of the Man Who Wrote and Lived "The Call of the Wild"

THE BOOK OF JACK LONDON. In Two Volumes. By Charmian London. The Century Company.

IT is no ordinary "literary biography" that fills the two volumes which his wife has written about Jack London. She has written of the man she knew, of the man he was, the man he aspired to be, and written as frankly and as clearly as he enjoined her to do.

Not only have you a story of the man's life, his travels, his thoughts on different subjects, his ideals; but there is a kind of compulsion in the narrative which brings the reader into the company of the living Jack London in his varied activities.

As he told his wife, "His Mate-Woman" as he called her, the story of the periods before they met, so she has endeavored to write it. It is not only a biography but almost an autobiography. Frequent use of his letters adds to this autobiographical effect.

Charmian London.

That Jack London's adventures with women would make vivid stories of a genius on that side where genius is most wont to break rules might have been guessed. That this phase of him should in fact be given to the world by the woman into whose hands he at last laid his whole life is remarkable. But the best thing about the book is the author's good reporting. She has not kept herself out of it—to try would have been futile and even injurious. But she reduces comment to the minimum, paints the picture, tells the story and leaves judgment to the reader.

It is clear that he turned to her not only his married side; to Jack London and Charmian Kitteredge marriage was a continual adventure of self-revelation. It was a point of honor as well as an intense desire with Jack that she should know and accept him entire—heights and depths, bewilderment and struggle. He had said that, should he die first, she would be the only person able to tell all the truth about him. And he expressed doubt that she would have the courage for it. He desired her to do this, as he himself would in all probability have done had the autobiography which he had in mind been written.

Of her publication of many of his letters to her Mrs. London says:

"Editors have repeatedly approached me on the subject of publishing Jack London's letters to myself. All arguments were barren of result save one: that Jack London's love nature is so little known or reckoned with in the average estimate of him, or, worse, misunderstood. . . . And because no just study of the man can otherwise be made I present throughout my book the letters I have chosen from the uncounted ones in my possession. Below I quote the very first in which he mentions his regard, something that had theretofore been undreamed of by me. . . .

"'You speak of frankness. I passionately desire it, but have come to shrink from the pain of intimacies which bring the greater frankness forth. Superficial frankness is comparatively easy, but one must pay for stripping off the dry husks of clothing, the self-conventions which masque the soul, and for standing out naked in the eyes of one who sees. I have paid, and like a child who has been burned by fire I shrink from paying too often. You surely have known such frankness and the penalties you paid. When I found heart's desire speaking clamorously to you I turned my eyes away and strove to go on with my superficial self, talking I know not what. And I did it consciously—partly so, perhaps—and I did it automatically, instinctively. Memories of old pains, incoherent hurts, a welter of remembrances, compelled me to close the mouth whereby my inner self was shouting at you a summons bound to give hurt and to bring hurt in return.

"'I wonder if I make you understand. You see, in the objective facts of my life I have always been frankness personified. That I tramped or begged or festered in jail or slum meant nothing by the telling. But over the lips of my inner self I had long since put a seal—a seal indeed rarely broken, in moments when one caught fleeting glimpses of the hermit who lived inside. How can I begin to explain? . . . My child life was uncongenial. There was little responsive around me. I learned reticence, an inner reticence. I went into the world early, and I adventured among different classes. A newcomer in any class, I naturally was reticent concerning my real self, which such a class could not understand, while I was superficially loquacious in order to make my entry into such a class popular and successful. And so it went, from class to class, from clique to clique. No intimacies, a continuous hardening, a superficial loquacity so clever, and an inner reticence so secret, that the one was taken for the real and the other never dreamed of.

"'Ask people who know me to-day, what I am. A rough, savage fellow, they will say, who likes prizefights and brutalities, who has a clever turn of pen, a charlatan's smattering of art, and the inevitable deficiences of the untrained, unrefined, self-made man which he strives with a fair measure of success to hide beneath an attitude of roughness and unconventionality. Do I endeavor to unconvince them? It's so much easier to leave their convictions alone.

"'And now the threads of my tangled discourse draw together. I have experienced the greater frankness several times, under provocation, with a man or two, and a woman or two, and the occasions have been great joygivers, as they have also been great sorrowgivers. I do not wish they had never happened, but I recoil unconsciously from their happening again. It is so much easier to live placidly and complacently. Of course, to live placidly and complacently is not to live at all, but still between prizefights and kites and one thing and another I manage to fool my inner self pretty well. Poor inner self! I wonder if it will atrophy, dry up some day and blow away.'"

Jack London's death seems to have occurred at the very flood tide of his powers—or, to be more accurate, at one of those periods of mental gestation when new life and power are gathering. Jack was troubled in the months before he died, but he was evidently growing. He had become deeply interested in psychoanalysis and was studying and thinking in that fertile field. It was a whole new life to him, and his long reading was culminating in reflections that would have meant work in a new and valuable phase. Jack had seen and experienced in his own person a primitive side of life totally unknown to many study and parlor literary analysts. He had much to give.

The two volumes are profusely illustrated and they are good reading for the story interest, but beyond that they suggest a field for the critic-biographer who will take the man's own books and trace the parallel development of his nature with the phases of his literary progress.

He Put Himself in Her Place

By W. L. GEORGE.

"URSULA TRENT" (Harper's) is simply planned as ten years in the life of a young woman, beginning a little before the war and ending about three years later. The war occupies no place in the book; it is only suggested so that the flight of time may be understood, but it is not developed, as we have had enough on that subject. It is specially destined to indicate that the war has not done so much as all that for young women, and that while many fields were opened to them during the war they closed as quickly as the valves of an oyster threatened with the abstraction of its pearl.

The heroine selected is intentionally chosen among the ordinary girls—a girl from the country, intelligent, resourceful, fairly plucky, fairly weak, generous, impetuous and foolish, absolutely untrained. In a word, just anybody. That is important, because the exceptional person seldom makes an interesting character. The book relates how after indulging in war service she found home life intolerable and determined to go out to work, develops her difficulty in finding work in the reconstructing world, her poverty, her slip into unfortunate and miserable affairs, and her final recovery, hardened and enriched by her experience.

So far that is a story which would not perhaps have enormously interested me to do, but the essence of it *and the real chance of its success* lies in the fact that it is the story of a woman written by a man *in the first person*. This has been done before by one or two Frenchmen, but it is very rare in England, because the Englishman realizes the immense difficulty which a man finds in writing as a woman. He has to make an imaginative and an emotional leap; he has to place himself in the position of a woman, to see himself handicapped as is even the modern woman by an early training in subservience, by a comparative lack of education, by physical weakness, and, above all, by the sense of superiority that nearly all men feel over nearly all women. He has also to give a twist to his mind, to develop a different sense of logic. I do not mean that he has to be illogical, for women are not illogical, but he has to adopt a woman's logic, which is different from that of a man, because a man is more likely to be governed by a general principle (however false) and a woman by a particular instance (however inappropriate). He has also to take into account that a woman's desire for a thing is infinitely more concentrated than that of a man. All humanity goes in blinkers, but woman tends to add a bandage to one of her eyes.

Add to this the difficulty for a man of imagining a woman's sensations, the physical emotions which he cannot feel, a woman's sense of the attractiveness of man, of his bulk, of his vigor, of all the things which move a woman toward a man. It is not wonderful that men should have so seldom attempted such an exercise; if it is successfully performed, there lies the chance of the popularity of the story.

Soon after "Ursula Trent" was written it was read by two women, and their opinion has a certain value. The first woman said: "Ursula Trent is quite a real girl, very much the sort of girl one meets, and I, for one, like her very much. She is the sort of girl I should like to make a friend of. I don't like Mr. George's men as well as his women; perhaps that is because he likes the women so much better."

The second woman said: "I think Ursula is absolutely real, and in fact it is quite worrying to see how completely men can find us out; I hope that there aren't too many men like that. I don't think Mr. George quite realizes the difficulty a girl experiences when she has to struggle against her family; but then his heroine has immense pluck, and I wish I had as much."

So far as the verdicts go they show that there is reality in Ursula, and that is the most important thing from the point of view of the female reader.

Capt. James Norman Hall of Lafayette Escadrille fame has been spending the last year and a half in various islands of the South Seas. He is now back in Boston, his old home, glad enough to be there, but still anxious to return to the region of Tahiti. Mr. Hall is almost as well known as a writer as in aviation. His "High Adventure" and "Kitchener's Mob" are among the outstanding books of the war.